4: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1948 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

of the husband's kinsfolk outside, who, squatting in front of it, likewise washes his hands in the water, and then fishes out the bracelet. The pot is returned to the hut and a different maiden and a different kinsman repeat the action of the first pair. All the close kinsfolk of the husband—his father's brothers and sisters, his mother's brothers and sisters, and his own brothers and sisters, and so on—are supposed to receive a bracelet, but, in fact, persons standing in some of these relationships will be absent and any person who can claim kinship with the husband can demand a bracelet. If a man's dip into the pot reveals a poor bracelet he does not hesitate to upbraid the girl who put it there and he may select a better one from those on her arm.

The concluding rite of the ceremony is the act from which it derives its name, the shaving of the wife's head (*mut nyier*) by a member of her husband's family. This may take place after the departure of her companions, for it is a domestic affair of the husband's *gol*, his home, of which the wife is now a member. The shaving of the head signifies this change in her status. People speak of the rite as *woci miem nyietde*, the removal of the hairs of maidenhood, and they say afterwards of the girl *Caa cek*, 'She has become a wife'. She is at the same time stripped of all her ornaments, which are divided among her husband's kin, and she is arrayed in new finery provided by her husband. She belongs to his, and not her father's, people now and it is for them to adorn her.

The Birth of a Child

The *mut* is the consummation of marriage, but not its completion, which is the birth of a child. The young wife is now called *cek ma kau*, a newly wed. Her parents give her a hut of her own and a sleeping-hide, a brush, and a couple of gourds for ablutions. When her husband comes to visit her in her father's homestead he sleeps with her in this hut. She continues in all other respects to lead the life she led before marriage, and after her husband's visits she hangs up the hide and domestic utensils and sleeps with her unmarried sisters. On these visits her husband stays at a neighbouring homestead as he cannot eat in the home of his parents-in-law and ought not to be seen there at all. When someone tells the wife that her husband has come, so that she may prepare for him, she feigns annoyance or lack of interest, pretending that she is still unmarried, a shyness she keeps up with third persons, though she is at ease when alone with her husband. When everyone is asleep he visits her and spends the night with her, leaving before any of the bride's people are about; her parents are supposed to know nothing of his visits, though, of course, they know all about his movements and it is even said that his mother-in-law may rise especially early and squint through a crack in the door of her hut in order to see him depart. Should he oversleep, and his mother-in-law sees his spears outside her daughter's hut, she makes them forfeit and he would be ashamed to ask for them back. It is not till a child has been born that the husband is accepted by his wife's people as one of themselves; he is then the father of their daughter's child and through the child has a kind of kinship link with them. Till this happens the husband continues to lead the life he lived before marriage, a bachelor life with his younger brothers in their father's byre. His wife visits him only on rare occasions and for a formal purpose, as when, at harvest time, she brings him coverings she has made for the grain on the drying-platforms, or when she takes him a bundle of well-cooked porridge made

587 kin would undoubtedly use violence to get back their cattle and, in addition, curse (*biit*) the wife 431 so that she would either become barren or her children die. On the other hand it sometimes happens that the wife's people promise to return 586 the cattle as soon as they are able to do so but 431 fail to return them all though procrastination on one pretext or another or prevarication, for they may hide (*piek*) some of their cows in the herds of kinsmen in distant districts. If the husband and his wife's father are members of the same local community difficulties of this kind are not likely to arise and can be settled by discussion and compromise. If they belong to different sections of the same tribe, and even more if they belong to different tribes, the dispute, as is the case with all issues of indemnity, is not so easily settled.

We may now consider in the light of these facts to what extent bridewealth may be said to stabilize marriage. Most broken marriages occur during or shortly after the nuptial ceremonies. One cannot properly speak of divorce at this stage because in Nuer eyes marriage is incomplete till a child has been born, the wife till this event living in her parents' home, being visited by her husband at nights from time to time. That till the birth of a child the wife is considered to belong to her own kin and not to her husband's kin is shown not only in her residence but in other ways, most noticeably by the fact that the husband is [844] held responsible for her death should she die in her first childbirth. He then has to pay compensation for homicide (*thung yiɔ̈a*). During this period when the union is looked upon as still only partly formed, the family and kinsmen of the wife do not, if they are wise, disperse the cattle. Were they to use them for a further marriage they would run the risk that this second marriage might have to be dissolved should the first be broken. Moreover they would find the kinsmen of any girl whom they might wish to marry most unwilling to accept cattle so insecurely held. I have found, when discussing cows in Nuer kraals, that they do not regard those animals they have received on the marriage of a kinswoman as fully theirs, in the sense that they can do what they like with them, till the kinswoman has borne

[p. 184a]

She continues her work the same as usual before the baby's advent. Some neighbour woman who has helped other children into the world is probably on hand to help usher hers in. But the help given is negligible. They await nature's process, sometimes holding the mother up in a sitting posture with just her feet touching the ground. A sheep may be sacrificed to expedite matters.

When the child is born the cord is cut with a knife or a sharp piece of cane. It is not tied, and does not bleed.

The mother's food consists of gruel for some days. Then she resumes her usual diet. She cares for her baby, the neighbour woman or her mother bathing it for her for several weeks. She feeds the baby whenever it cries and usually gives it cow's milk until she has enough of her own for it.

When preparing the bath for the baby an earthen pot of water is heated. The baby is bathed in the late afternoon. The body is thoroughly greased all over, then the water (to us it seems like quite hot water) is splashed upon it, while the one who is bathing the baby rubs it briskly, massaging its back especially. Then when this part of the bath is over, she washes the child's eyes by licking them with her tongue, much as a cat would do with its kitten. The nose is also cleaned in like manner.

Various plans are resorted to in order to guard the baby from the evil eye. Charms are put upon its body, being fastened to necklace or wristlet. A rope is stretched out in the yard so that passers-by will know that strangers are not welcome.

The young mother sends word to her husband when she wants him to know about the birth of the child, so that he may come. No one asks whether it is a boy or a girl. The father may bring his wife a present of fish, and he may try to keep her supplied with fish for a little while.

owner killed a man of another district, he began a feud and was liable to be killed by the kin of his victim. It seems that fetish owners were treated differently in different areas. Many people possess medicines which protect them from fetishes. 754

Death may be due to one of three causes: *olic kwoth* (a sickness of god), sorcery and the evil eye, or sickness due to fetishes. This last is sudden and may kill a man quickly, whereas a sickness sent by god is usually prolonged.(1) A man believing himself to be ill on account of a fetish summons a fetish owner to discover whose fetish is responsible. When this is known a sacrifice is made to the fetish and its owner is asked to stop it troubling the sick man. 754 753

When a fetish owner dies, his medicines are preserved until his spirit enter into one of his descendants who will then become a fetish owner in his stead. A man may purchase a fetish from another; the medicine is only the habitation of the fetish spirits who exist apart from it. The Nuer believe that a fetish kills someone because its owner dislikes him. 754

The Nuer Ghoul

Many of the Nilotic tribes believe in ghouls who feed on the bodies of those recently dead. This belief is found among the Acholi, Anuak, Shilluk, Lango, Dinka and Nuer. The Nuer ghoul is called the *ruath* and is regarded with horror by the people. The practice of ghoulist activities is to some extent hereditary, for the potentiality is found in certain lineages, but a man may become a *ruath* even if he is not a member of such a lineage. Disinterment of the dead is regarded as his most horrible activity.

A *ruath* may be killed by common consent and, although no blood must be spilt, he may be beaten to death with sticks without fear of revenge. This is the only instance among the Nuer of killing which does not demand compensation or vengeance.

LIFE CYCLE

BIRTH

In childbirth a woman is attended by a female relative who is herself already a mother. The child's incisor teeth are removed at the age of eight years. 844 854 804

The birth of twins constitutes a danger to their family; special decorations are worn by the kinsmen, animals are sacrificed, and ritual prohibitions observed. As do other Nilotic groups, the Nuer believe that the parents are safe if the twins are of opposite sexes, for the boy will want to preserve his father and the girl her mother. In spite of the dangers, however, the Nuer are joyful at the birth of twins if they both live. Throughout life, twins are subject to certain ritual observances; before a twin can get married they must both together go through a fictional 845 582

(1) Evans-Pritchard, *S.N.S.*, 1935, p.74.